

Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations
Membership Meeting of May 19, 2005
MINUTES

The meeting of FCFCA was held at the Packard Center at 7:30 p.m. (Attendance list is attached.) Note: The speaker was delayed and some Federation business was conducted before the program. For simplicity, the program is recorded here first, followed by the business meeting. President Carol Hawn introduced the Honorable Gerald Connolly, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Fairfax County.

Program —

Chairman Connolly reported on the six priorities upon which the Board of Supervisors (BOS) has unanimously agreed. He emphasized these are not intended to exclude other issues, such as the effects of the Fort Belvoir staff expansion; the early childhood program; and the teenage driving initiative. The six priorities are gang prevention; affordable housing; education; the environment; transportation diversification; and revenue diversification.

Gang prevention is meant to help keep gangs from becoming a major problem; Fairfax County currently has the lowest crime rate of any of the country's 50 largest jurisdictions, with the fewest police per capita. The county has a solid law enforcement and suppression effort, but is working to build up intervention and prevention, especially in middle school. After the gang summit held by local governments, a task force was established that will report to the BOS in June. The police gang unit has been expanded by four officers. More after-school activities are planned for middle schools, on the model of Club 78 at Holmes Intermediate. Cox Communications has made a \$3 million donation toward extracurricular activities. New Boys and Girls Clubs are being started. There is a gang hotline and a mobile team to give talks.

The county's focus is to preserve the affordable housing that exists now. A preservation summit last June led to a task force that submitted 12 recommendations, including the dedication of a penny from the tax rate to affordable housing preservation. The Board of Supervisors accepted all 12 recommendations. An affordable-housing SWAT team will locate opportunities to preserve affordable housing. Typically, the housing will be purchased with funds from non-profit groups, the county, and for-profit entities.

Fairfax County has 167,000 students, making it the country's 12th largest school system; 92 percent of graduates go on to higher education. All the county high schools were again included in Newsweek's list of the 100 best U.S. high schools; Fairfax County is the only large school system to achieve this honor. The schools are now 50/50 white/non-white; within three years, minority students will become a majority. There is also a growing number of disabled students and those for whom English is a second language. Of the county general fund, 53 percent goes to the school system, in addition to \$70 to 80 million in other school-related costs. The school-age population has leveled out, although some new schools are needed in high-growth areas; the focus is shifting to renovation of older schools. Chairman Connolly said the time may have come to rein in school spending and seek more savings. His target for next year is a 6 percent increase in the transfer amount. The Federation's Education Committee Chair, Charles Dane, challenged the use of an arbitrary percentage without looking at the specific needs of meeting No Child Left Behind targets and increasing special-needs portions of the school population, although both he and Chairman Connolly agreed the school system should always be looking for operational efficiencies.

The environment was the subject of an October 2003 report that has been adopted as county policy. Accomplishments include retrofitting 30 watersheds, converting the bus fleet to low-sulfur diesel, buying hybrid vehicles for the county fleet while banning SUV purchases for the fleet, and buying new parkland to preserve green space—county-owned parkland is up 30 percent in the last 5 years and accounts for 9.2 percent of the county's area. Chairman Connolly has challenged the Park Authority to reach 10 percent.

In transportation, the focus is on generating additional choices and options. Initiatives include rail to Dulles; the Richmond Express (Rex) bus service, which has increased transit ridership in that corridor 20

percent; HOT lanes on the Beltway; and telework. Projects now underway include the Mixing Bowl, which is on time and on budget; the Woodrow Wilson Bridge; the completion of the County Parkway by 2007; rail to Dulles, which will be completed to Wiehle within 6 to 7 years; widening of West Ox Road from 123 to Occoquan; and the projects financed by the transportation bond, which include funding increased Metrorail capacity and spot improvements of intersections that are bottlenecks.

Tax diversification remains a concern because of overdependence on residential property taxes, now up to 60 percent of all revenues. Recent revenue additions have included the cigarette tax increase, the recordation tax increase, the hotel tax, and \$125 million more for schools as part of the state's tax reform package. This year, for the first time in 14 years, every county revenue source went up; for 4 years, all but residential property taxes have been down or flat. These include commercial real estate, sales tax, telecommunications tax, utility fees, and investment interest income. This permitted a reduction to the residential rate of 13 cents (equivalent to \$230 million), reducing the rate to \$1.00.

Chairman Connolly also answered questions about trails; the cost of the Emergency Operations Center; the cost of the computerized communications system for police; better services for students with learning disabilities; telecommuting by county and school staff; the potential for a stormwater utility fee; the impact on the Route One corridor of the planned increase of the Fort Belvoir staff from 24,000 to 42,000; and the development of the Fairlee site and Sweeney tract near the Vienna Metro.

Business Meeting —

- a. The minutes for the April 21 membership meeting were discussed and approved as amended.
- b. Art Wells, as Chair of the Nominating Committee, presented the slate of nominees for the 2005-2006 Federation offices. The slate, as published in the newsletter, included John Jennison for President, Pat Rea for First Vice President, Carey Campbell for Second Vice President, Esther Ferington for Recording Secretary, Judith H'Ormaycht for Corresponding Secretary, and Jeff Parnes for Treasurer. Other nominations were then requested from the floor. There being none, the slate was approved unanimously. President Carol Hawn thanked Art Wells and the Nominating Committee.
- c. Charles Dane reported that the Education Committee met entirely by e-mail for the first time. The Superintendent had proposed increasing teachers' starting salaries to \$40,000 and increasing bus drivers' salaries from \$10 to \$15 an hour, as well as reducing middle-school class sizes. The School Board approved these initiatives in late April. The committee has continued to urge that the decisions about the use of former school property be subject to public review after staff review of parcels for legal restrictions and other considerations.
- d. Jeffrey Nolan reported that the annual report to the state by the Advisory Committee on Students with Disabilities for FCPS has been approved.
- e. Sally Ormsby reported that the Fairlee development was the topic of the most recent Providence District Council meeting.
- f. Jeffrey Nolan reported that the Braddock District Council has established its own website.
- g. Bill Hanks commended President Carol Hawn's farewell message in the Federation newsletter.

Next Membership Meeting: June 16. Jorge Arias, Fairfax County Health Department, Environmental Health Entomologist and West Nile Virus Coordinator, on control of disease-carrying insects

Next Board Meeting: June 23.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.